

- The College of Southern Idaho is partnering with St. Luke's Magic Valley Regional Medical Center to secure high-tech patient simulators for use in both the laboratory of the new hospital and the new health science building planned for the college campus. This will make the technology available to all health care professionals in the region. The college is raising \$500,000 for the equipment. At the same time, one of the state's top health care educators, Claudeen Buettner, has retired after 36 years at the school where she ultimately served as chief academic officer and executive vice president. She has been a major force in nursing education and is responsible for the significant expansion of the health care curriculum at the college.
- The media have expounded on the lackluster state of the residential real estate market, but the information provided by the Twin Falls Multiple Listing Service paints a less dismal picture locally as shown in SC Table 2 on page 13. Certainly, price appreciation is continuing, particularly in the new construction sales with an upswing of 13.3 percent from 2006 to

2007. Inventories are dropping, but homes are still sitting on the market longer than in the past so builders are being forced to be patient if they want to see some price appreciation — depending on their individual financial situations. There is definitely a distinction between new construction and existing homes with the volume and value of new home sales falling more sharply. The number of new home sales is typically a smaller portion of the market due to the cost differential. The south central region's median wage typically lags the state and the nation. The value of all home sales dropped 5.5 percent from 2006 while the number of sales was off 12.6 percent. Still, the average price was up 8.1 percent from 2006, something builders would envy in Nevada, Florida or California where the subprime loan debacle has hit the hardest.

Jan Roeser, Regional Economist
420 Falls Ave., Twin Falls, ID 83301
(208) 735-2500, ext. 3639
E-mail: jan.roeser@labor.idaho.gov



Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida & Power counties

ECONOMIC TRENDS

The unemployment rate rose only fractionally from November to December in the Pocatello Metropolitan Statistical Area. The one-tenth of a point bump to 2.8 percent meant only 50 more workers were without jobs in December, primarily because of the temporary lay-offs at Con Agra in Power County. Jobs lost to cold and inclement winter weather in construction and agriculture-related trades were nearly offset by a boost in food manufacturing and government services. This realignment is fairly typical during the winter. It appears local retailers were in line with a national trend this holiday season, holding back on holiday hiring. Unemployment rates for nearly all of the counties in southeastern Idaho remained low and in most cases below a year earlier. See Table 1 for details. The slight increase in Oneida County reflects a reduction in the work force at Hess Pumice. Most of the workers who were laid off are believed to have found jobs but are commuting 30 or 40 miles.

SE Table 1: Southeastern Idaho County Unemployment Rates
— December 2007, December 2006

County/Area	Dec 2007	Dec 2006
Bannock	3.30%	2.50%
Bear Lake	2.70%	2.30%
Bingham	3.00%	2.80%
Caribou	3.80%	2.90%
Franklin	2.90%	1.60%
Oneida	2.10%	1.90%
Power	4.50%	5.50%

SPECIAL TOPIC — Volunteerism and the Labor Force

Labor statistics are most often related to the civilian labor force, which includes civilian workers 16 years of age and older not residing in institutions, who are either employed, or unemployed and actively seeking work. But another segment of the American work force which is often overlooked but merits recognition is the volunteer work force. Volunteers work without the expectation of a tangible reward, and Americans have a reputation for volunteer-

ing their time and talents to help others. Often the volunteers say their time spent working as a volunteer is more personally rewarding than if they were getting paid a wage. There is much empirical evidence that volunteering results in health benefits to the volunteer. In addition there is also substantial economic activity that is often not considered part of the economy but in fact is a very important element. Without volunteerism at all levels, each governmental unit would need to be much larger to provide the social, cultural and educational activities volunteers now provide. Eighty percent of volunteering is in the nonprofit independent sector such as the Heart Association, Habitat for Humanity, Red Cross and American Cancer Society where volunteer time is one-quarter of the total labor input. The other 20 percent involves a wide range of governmental and quasi-governmental entities.

In the mid-1990s the Financial Accounting Standards Board, the rule-making group for the accounting profession, issued standards requiring nonprofits to report the value of volunteer services as part of their contributions on external financial statements. Before this most agencies would make a mention of volunteer work in a footnote and not assign it a value and some would fail to make any mention of volunteer help. The new standard is providing better information on the extent of volunteer help. Data on volunteering was collected through a supplement to the September 2007 Current Population Survey and was recently made available at http://www.bls.gov/cps/cps_subjects.htm#volunteering. It shows that about 61 million people volunteered some work at least once between September 2006 and September 2007. This number represented about 26 percent of the population, down a half point from the previous year and over 2.5 percentage points in two years. The median time spent on volunteer activities during that year was 52 hours, and both men and women reported the same median volunteer time. Individuals with higher levels of education volunteered at higher rates than those with lower education levels. Employed individuals reported more time spent volunteering than unemployed workers. And individuals not in the civilian work force reported volunteering substantially more than the others.

Each organization is encouraged to report the value of volunteer services based on the work actually performed by volunteers and not on the rate of pay volunteers get at their regular jobs. The estimated dollar amount assigned to volunteer time in 2005 by Independent Sector, a leadership forum for charities, foundations and corporate giving programs, was \$18.04 per hour for the nation and \$13.55 for Idaho volunteer workers. Using the same percentages of participation for the southeastern Idaho population as the nation, there would have been 43,788 individuals volunteering 2.2 million hours of time at a rate of \$13 an hour for a total value of nearly \$29 million in 2007.

SPECIAL TOPIC — Dwindling Interest in Reserve Program

High prices for many of the crops grown in southeastern Idaho may have diminished area farmers' interest in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. State policy makers had hoped the voluntary cooperative state and federal program would result in 100,000 acres of cropland being idled, reducing the amount of water pumped from the Snake River Plain Aquifer by 200,000 acre feet each year. Operators receive an annual payment per acre if they agree not to farm the land for 15 years. Participation would also reduce chemicals, contaminants and sediment entering the Snake River system. The deadline for application was extended from Dec. 31 to March 15 in hopes more farmers would sign up. According to Steve Fullmer, executive director of Bingham County's U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Services Agency, land subject to curtailment of water will not be eligible for the reserve if a curtailment order is issued prior to application. If a curtailment order is issued after the land has been accepted in the program the contracts will still be honored.

COUNTY DEVELOPMENTS

BANNOCK COUNTY

- More than 100 vendors set up in Holt Arena in mid-January for what is becoming known as the biggest and best agricultural show in Idaho. The show attracts people from all over the United States and other countries.
- A Travelocity.com article about favorite stops in America listed the Mystique Theater in Chubbuck and Buddy's restaurant in Pocatello as two of the best. There were 295 sites selected from more than 10,000 nominations. The free advertising will last for a year. It is too early to know if the recognition on an international Web site is resulting in any more sales, but with the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver there is a good chance it will.
- Virginia Transformer recently moved into a larger building in the Gateway West industrial park, spending about \$1 million on equipment last year and planning to spend another \$1.5 million in 2008 to meet rising demand. The company is planning to hire 25 new workers. Its payroll currently is 170.
- Construction on a \$6.3 million addition to Idaho State University's Student Recreation Center is slated to begin this spring. The two-level structure is funded entirely by student fees and will include a fitness center, multi-purpose rooms, lounges and administrative offices.
- Construction activity in 2007 for Bannock County did not quite keep up with the record pace of 2006, but it was one of the busiest on record, according to Pocatello building official, Lynn Transtrum. Total value of permits in 2007 was \$70.1 million compared to \$93.3 million in 2006. The difference was primarily residential construction. In 2006 residential construc-

tion value was about \$30 million, and it fell to \$19 million in 2007. Commercial construction also slowed but not as much as it might seem. Much of the construction taking place in early 2007 was done on permits purchased in 2006 and work carried over throughout the winter months. Prior to 2006, construction permits averaged around \$40 million a year, according to Transtrum.

- Idaho Power Co. will build a \$14.8 million substation for Hoku Scientific Inc.'s planned polysilicon plant in Pocatello. As part of the construction agreement, Hoku made an initial payment of \$3.75 million to Idaho Power on Jan. 8. The substation should be completed by Feb. 15, 2009.

BEAR LAKE COUNTY

- The Oregon Trail-Bear Lake Scenic Byway Committee prioritized the Gutzon Borglum Memorial as a project for 2008. Initial plans call for a sculpted memorial in St. Charles and a visitor's site in Bloomington. The committee is also working with a developer on the feasibility of a Bear Lake overlook in the Fish Haven area.

BINGHAM COUNTY

- The Bingham County Planning and Zoning Commission has approved zoning for a subdivision northeast of Shelley consisting of 83 one-third-acre lots connected to community water and sewer systems.
- The Eastern Idaho State Fair had another good year in 2007. Despite rainy and cold days, which caused cancellation of some events, attendance and revenue were up from 2006. The fair employs nearly 400 workers part-time and is a large economic stimulus for Blackfoot and all of southeastern Idaho. Revenue for the 2007 fair totaled \$2.9 million.
- Idaho State University Director of Workforce Training Joe Fleishman urged members of the Greater Blackfoot Chamber of Commerce to consider the benefits of maintaining a well-trained work force. He discussed the many opportunities for training that exist for every imaginable occupation. In addition to numerous on-site, video-trainer and self-study courses, there are more than 500 online courses available. Find out more by calling (208) 282-3372 or logging onto the Web at to <http://workforcetraining.isu.edu>.
- A 42,500-square-foot medical office building for family practice doctors, general surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, dermatologists, obstetricians and gynecologists will be completed in December. The building, which will also house a pain clinic and the Rural Health Clinic, is being financed by Bingham Memorial Hospital and individual physicians.
- Areas potato farmers welcomed the news that the United Nations has declared 2008 as the "International Year of the Potato." The declaration should increase awareness of the potato's impor-

tance as a food for developing countries. The potato was selected because of its nutritional value and ability to be grown in harsh climates. The last time the U.N. declared an international year dedicated to a single food was 2004 when rice was selected.

CARIBOU COUNTY

- The efforts of many companies and individuals to control air emissions were recognized when recent air quality control surveys were released by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. Past surveys have found Caribou County with emissions that exceeded standards, but the most recent surveys found Caribou County well within limits.
- Increased crop prices this past year pushed Agrium's Conda phosphate operation to another production record. The increase will not be a great deal larger than the 2006 record, but slow and steady growth is encouraging to Agrium management and workers. As prices for crops increase, producers are more likely to buy fertilizers. Agrium's Conda plant employs 265 workers, and another 130 work in mining and other directly related occupations. In June 2008, Agrium plans to shut the plant down to install a \$9 million sulphuric acid converter and drying tower.

FRANKLIN COUNTY

- The Larry H. Miller family is donating 20 acres in north Preston for the new Franklin County Medical Center facility. The new clinic is estimated to cost \$15 million.
- Preston City Council is considering impact fees to help mitigate growth-related costs. The fees would raise revenue for new or expanding public facilities such as water lines and waste treatment plants to serve a growing population.
- Commuter bus ridership continues to rise for the Preston-to-Logan Cache Valley Transit District bus service. In December 2007 there were 1,087 rides, up significantly from 670 riders a year earlier. Company officials want to develop other border routes like Bear Lake to Rich County and Oneida to Box Elder County.

POWER COUNTY

- Power County Building Administrator Bob Steinlicht said three subdivisions have been approved in the county in the last six months. Steinlicht speculated that just the talk of new businesses such as the proposed energy center near the Con-Agra potato processing plant has sparked an interest in developing subdivisions.

Scott Hobdey Regional Economist
430 N. 5th Ave., Pocatello, ID 83205
(208) 236-6710, ext. 3713
E-mail: scott.hobdey@labor.idaho.gov

Southeastern Idaho Data — December 2007

Pocatello MSA Labor Force & Employment Bannock and Power counties

	Dec 2007*	Nov 2007	Dec 2006	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
<i>Seasonally Adjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	44,330	44,350	45,250	0.0	-2.0
Unemployment	1,240	1,190	1,550	4.2	-20.0
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.8	2.7	3.4		
Total Employment	43,090	43,160	43,700	-0.2	-1.4
<i>Unadjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	44,380	43,690	45,140	1.6	-1.7
Unemployment	1,240	1,100	1,550	12.7	-20.0
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.8	2.5	3.4		
Total Employment	43,140	42,590	43,590	1.3	-1.0
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	39,690	39,880	39,820	-0.5	-0.3
<i>Goods-Producing Industries</i>	5,580	5,710	5,770	-2.3	-3.3
Natural Resources & Mining	30	30	20	0.0	50.0
Construction	1,910	2,010	2,050	-5.0	-6.8
Manufacturing	3,640	3,670	3,700	-0.8	-1.6
Food Manufacturing	1,360	1,340	1,290	1.5	5.4
Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	180	180	170	0.0	5.9
Machinery Manufacturing	350	360	260	-2.8	34.6
Other Manufacturing	1,750	1,800	1,890	-2.8	-7.4
<i>Service-Providing Industries</i>	34,110	34,170	34,050	-0.2	0.2
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	7,490	7,570	7,610	-1.1	-1.6
Wholesale Trade	1,360	1,370	1,360	-0.7	0.0
Retail Trade	4,790	4,820	4,740	-0.6	1.1
Utilities	50	50	50	0.0	0.0
Transportation & Warehousing	1,290	1,330	1,460	-3.0	-11.6
Information	710	690	780	2.9	-9.0
Financial Activities	2,280	2,290	2,160	-0.4	5.6
Professional & Business Services	5,580	5,610	5,520	-0.5	1.1
Educational & Health Services	3,520	3,500	3,250	0.6	8.3
Leisure & Hospitality	3,610	3,610	3,430	0.0	5.2
Other Services	1,190	1,160	1,140	2.6	4.4
Government Education	6,030	6,140	5,880	-1.8	2.6
Government Administration	3,700	3,600	4,280	2.8	-13.6

*Preliminary Estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month